

250 Often Confused Words

Below is a list of more than 250 words that speakers and writers of English often confuse. They are called *false cognates* because they sound or are written so similarly that they are often confused. Even if you are an excellent writer, you should read through this list; otherwise, how will you know if you are confusing any words? We will soon have a quiz that will help you check your knowledge of the most common false English cognates.

• A •	
WORDS	DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES
a lot allot	A lot is two words meaning "much": A lot of bologna was left over from the party.
a while awhile	A while is two words meaning "a short period of time": I will meet you in a while.
a an and	A is an indefinite article to be used before nouns beginning with a consonant: <i>a</i> photograph, <i>a</i> tree, <i>a</i> horse. An is to be used before nouns beginning with a vowel (or vowel sound): <i>an</i> apple, <i>an</i> hour, <i>an</i> elephant. And is a conjunction used between nouns in a list: A blanket and picnic basket are needed for the afternoon.
accede exceed	Accede means "to agree or allow": Hiram Cheaply finally <i>acceded</i> to accepting the presidency of the company. Exceed means "to go beyond, to surpass": The amount of alcohol in his blood <i>exceeded</i> the previous record.
accept except	Accept means "to take willingly": Miss Deeds <i>accepted</i> the cup of hot tea even without a saucer. Except is a preposition meaning "excluding": Everyone was disappointed with the party <i>except</i> Ida Goodtime.
adapt adept adopt	Adapt means "to adjust": Minnie Miles quickly adapted to living away from home. Adept means "skilled": Lucille is adept at speaking languages. Adopt means to "accept as your own": It was difficult to adopt only one puppy from the animal shelter.
adverse averse	Adverse means "unfavorable, hostile": Those driving in adverse winter conditions may be putting themselves at risk. Averse means "unwilling or repelled": She was immediately averse to the idea.
advice	Advice is a noun meaning "an opinion given with the intention of

advise	<p>helping": My mother still gives me advice even though I'm 40 years old.</p> <p>Advise is a verb meaning "to give counsel or advice": The meteorologist advised listeners to stay indoors because of the extremely cold temperatures.</p>
affect effect	<p>Affect is most often used as a verb meaning "to influence": The president's speech affected his views of the upcoming election.</p> <p>The verb effect means "to cause": Batting her eyes so flirtatiously effected a strong desire in Rathbone to embrace Mirabelle.</p>
aid aide	<p>Aid is help or assistance given: Every Christmas the community gives aid to those less fortunate.</p> <p>An aide is a person who helps: Frieda Gogh worked five years as a teacher's aide.</p>
airs heirs	<p>Airs refers to snobbish and artificial behavior: Portia Radclyffe put on airs at the fine dinner party just because she had a few diamonds.</p> <p>Heirs are people who, because they are family, will inherit an estate or title.</p>
all right alright	<p>All right is a phrase meaning "everything is right": Is all right here?</p> <p>Alright is a single word meaning "OK": Is everything alright here?</p>
all together altogether	<p>All together is applied to people or things that are being treated as a whole: We always had fun when we were all together. To double check this usage, try separating the two words: We all had fun when were together.</p> <p>Altogether is an adverb that means "completely or totally": Using a flashlight in bed is an altogether new approach to reading.</p>
all ways always	<p>All ways means "by every means or method": Dirk tried all ways to navigate the storm.</p> <p>Always means "forever": Sue St. Marie always responded calmly during emergency situations.</p>
allude elude	<p>Allude means "to suggest indirectly": Leticia can't speak to her husband without alluding to his affair with Martha Snodgrass.</p> <p>Elude means "to dodge or escape": Serious relationships always seemed to elude him.</p>
allusion illusion	<p>An allusion is a subtle reference or hint: Rita Book made an allusion to the most recent novel she read in our conversation yesterday.</p> <p>An illusion is a deception, mirage, or a wild idea: The teacher said she had no illusions about how much work teaching demands.</p>
almost most	<p>Almost means "nearly all": Almost all my friends have graduated from college by now.</p> <p>Most is superlative of <i>more</i>, meaning "the greatest or to the highest degree": Chuck is the most computer savvy guy I know, or Chuck cooked a most delicious supper.</p>
aloud	<p>Aloud means "speaking so that someone else can hear you": Read this</p>

allowed	<p>paragraph aloud.</p> <p>Allowed means "having permission": His boss allowed him to take the weekend off.</p>
already, all ready	<p>Already is an adverb that indicates an action is completed by a certain time: Herschel had already finished that whole pie.</p> <p>All ready means "everything is completely prepared": The children were all ready and bundled up warmly to go caroling on the snowy evening.</p>
alternately alternatively	<p>Alternately means "taking turns": We paddled alternately so neither of us would get too tired.</p> <p>Alternatively means "as an option": Instead of going by train, we could have gone alternatively by car.</p>
ambiguous ambivalent	<p>Ambiguous is describes a phrase or act with more than one meaning, or one that is unclear: The ending of the short story is ambiguous; we don't know if he died or continue his journey.</p> <p>Ambivalent means "uncertainty and having conflicting attitudes and feelings": He was ambivalent as to which candidate to vote for.</p>
amiable amicable	<p>Amiable refers to a person who is friendly, good-natured, and pleasant: Susan was very amiable and liked immediately.</p> <p>Amicable means "friendly and peaceable", and is used to describe agreements or relationships between groups or people: After years of disagreement, the two countries came to an amicable agreement.</p>
among between	<p>Among is used for three or more: Shirley had to choose among three universities she might attend.</p> <p>Between is used for two things: I couldn't decide between blue and green.</p>
amoral immoral	<p>Amoral means "having no principles at all, good or bad": Percy is totally amoral; he is either helping others or helping himself at their expense.</p> <p>Immoral means "bad, lacking good principles": Everything his brother does harms others whether it benefits him or not.</p>
amount number	<p>Amount is used with uncountable and abstract nouns: a large amount of money, amount of work, amount of happiness or amount of dirt.</p> <p>Number is used with countable and concrete plural expressions: a number of people, a number of attempts, a number of novels, a number of trials.</p>
amused bemused	<p>Amused is when something is entertaining: The children were amused by watching the kittens play.</p> <p>Bemused means "bewildered" or "lost in thought": George was bemused by the unexpected ending to the movie.</p>
annual annul	<p>Annual means "yearly": We must pay an annual tax.</p> <p>Annul means "to make void or invalid": They want to annul the</p>

	marriage.
any one anyone	Any one means "any one person": Any one of you may go, but not all of you. Anyone means "anybody, any person at all": Anyone can chew gum and walk at the same time.
anyway anywhere nowhere anyways anywheres nowheres	Anyway, anywhere, and nowhere are the correct forms.
apart a part	Apart is an adverb meaning "in pieces": My plan for my vacation fell apart. A part is a noun meaning "one section of": A part of my heart left when he did.
appraise apprise	Appraise is to assess or estimate the worth of: to appraise a diamond. Apprise is to inform or notify: the officer apprised us of our rights.
arcane archaic	Arcane refers to things known and understood by few people: Amanda Lynn teaches arcane theories of modern music at the college. Archaic refers to things very, very old and outdated: The Oxford English Dictionary contains many words that are archaic.
as like	As may be used as a conjunction that introduce dependent clauses: George talks as his father does. Informally, it may also be used as a preposition in comparative constructions like: Jean-Claude is as forgetful as me (or as I am). Like is a preposition is followed by a noun or pronoun: George looks like his mother. It may also be used as an adjective meaning "similar": George and I have like minds.
ascent assent	Ascent is an upward movement: Leo's ascent to the presidency of the company came slowly. Assent means "to agree to": Greta could not begin the project unless management assented.
ascetic aesthetic	An ascetic is a person who renounces all material comforts, often for religious devotion: the young man lead his ascetic lifestyle despite his parents' plans for him. It can also be used as an adjective: Ethan Asia led an ascetic lifestyle. Aesthetic refers to the philosophy of beauty or the pleasing qualities of something: The statuette Leander created was lacking in aesthetic qualities.
ascribe describe	Ascribe means "to attribute to": She ascribed her feelings of jealousy to insecurity. Describe means "to show what something is by drawing a picture with

aspersion
dispersion

words": Describe in detail what the man looked like.

Aspersion is slander, a damaging remark: The campaign was filled with one aspersion after another.

Dispersion is the act of scattering: The dispersion of seeds was irregular because he sowed the seeds by hand.

assent
ascent

[See ascent, assent.](#)

assistance
assistants

Assistance is help or aid: the nurses gave assistance to the patients.

Assistants are more than one assistant, a person who gives help: the emergency room assistants were ready to help anyone who came through the door. ([See also patience and patients.](#))

assure
ensure
insure

Assure means "to guarantee": He assured her it was a quality item.

Ensure means "to make sure by double checking": The custodian ensured the doors to the school were locked at night.

Insure means "to provide insurance": It is wise to insure your house against flood, fire, or theft.

An **auger** is a tool used for digging holes: If you want to ice fish, you need to first drill a hole in the ice with an auger.

Augur means "to predict, forecast": Leroy's inheritance augured happiness for him in the future.

auger
augur

• B •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

bad
badly

Bad is an adjective used after verbs like am, feel, is, seem, and become: They felt bad. (Using badly here would mean that their skill at feeling is poor).

	<p>Badly is an adverb used after other verbs: They played badly. Badly can also mean "greatly": They needed food badly.</p> <p>Baited usually refers to traps: Baiting deer in order to hunt them is illegal in most states.</p> <p>Bated is seldom used but means "reduced, abated": Jessica bated her pace to let her running mate catch up.</p> <p>Bare means "naked": Walking in grass with bare feet is refreshing.</p> <p>Bear is the animal, and also means "to carry": Sherman must bear the burden of flunking math twice.</p> <p>Bazaar is an exhibition, market, or fair: The Saturday morning bazaar is worth seeing even if you buy nothing.</p> <p>Bizarre means "weird and unworldly": Barry told us a bizarre story last night.</p> <p>Belief is a noun: He had strong beliefs.</p> <p>Believe is a verb: She believes she can do anything.</p> <p>Beside means "next to": Place the dishes beside the sink.</p> <p>Besides is an adverb or preposition that means "also, additionally": I would enjoy going on a vacation besides.</p> <p>Had better is the correct form, used when giving advice that hints at an undesirable consequence if not followed: You had better go to the doctor. Don't leave out have.</p> <p>See among, between.</p> <p>Biannual is twice in one year: My trip to the dentist is a biannual event.</p> <p>Biennial means "every two years": These flowers are biennial; they bloom every two years.</p> <p>Bimonthly means "every two months": We order from the co-op bimonthly.</p> <p>Semimonthly means "twice a month (biweekly)": We have our house cleaned semimonthly.</p> <p>Blithe, an adjective, means "lighthearted and carefree": A blithe mood overcomes us in the spring.</p> <p>Lithe is also an adjective but it means "flexible, graceful, and supple": The lithe movements of the yoga instructor impressed us all.</p> <p>Blonde describes women: Brunettes have just as much fun as blondes (blonde women).</p> <p>Blond describes men: Sean was not a natural blond. This distinction is not necessary though: blond is now generally accepted for both men and women.</p> <p>Board means a few things. One is "a long sheet of wood": Hiram had to cut the board to make the shelves. It also means "a committee": The</p>
baited bated	
bare bear	
bazaar bizarre	
belief believe	
beside besides	
better had better	
between among	
biannual biennial	
bimonthly semimonthly	
blithe lithe	
blonde blond	
board bored	

	board of directors met to decide the fate of the school. Lastly, it can mean "to get onto": She boarded the ship.
	Bored means "not interested": She is bored by the dry lecture.
bore	A bore is a boring or tiresome person or thing: Jasper is such a bore when he talks about his cats!
boar	A boar is a male pig: Wild boars abound in this forest.
boor	A boor is an unrefined, vulgar person: What a boor Guy was to get drunk at the wedding and embarrass everyone.
born	Born is newly coming into life: A child was born at 12:01 New Year's day.
borne	Borne means "carried": All gossip is borne by an ill wind.
	Borrow is to receive something from someone temporarily: to borrow a book and then return it.
borrow	Lend is a verb that mean "to temporarily give something to someone": Henry will lend (or loan) Francine a book.
lend	Loan is a noun: a bank loan. Loan is often used in American English as a verb meaning "to lend": Loan me a book, please.
loan	Braise means "to cook (usually meat) slowly in liquid": Braised meat is usually tender.
braise	To braise is to solder or create with metals such as bronze: Shirley brazed a statue of a famous Civil War leader.
braise	Brake means "to stop": You should brake slowly on ice.
brake	Break means "to smash": To break a mirror brings seven years of worse luck than you are having now.
break	Breath is a noun meaning "the air pulled into the lungs": Take a deep breath and relax.
breath	Breathe , with an E on the end, is a verb: Just breathe deeply and calm down.
breathe	Bridal has to do a bride and her wedding: June May threw her bridal bouquet to the screaming crowd of single women.
bridal	A bridle is a halter or restraint, such as a horse bridle: Old Frosty didn't like the bridle over his head.
bridle	By is a preposition meaning "next to": Park the car by the house.
by	Buy means "purchase": Grandpa buys an ice cream cone every Sunday afternoon.
buy	Bye means "farewell or good-bye": Bye, now; I'll see you later.
bye	



WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

can't hardly	<p>This expression is a nonstandard double negative (hardly is considered negative), so avoid it. It is better to say can hardly: I can hardly hear you over the noise of the party! Hardly.</p>
canvas canvass	<p>Canvas is cloth or fabric: a canvas bag to bring to the beach.</p> <p>Canvass means "to conduct a survey or examine thoroughly", or "to seek votes": She canvassed all the stores before she found the right dress.</p>
capital capitol	<p>A capital is where the seat of government is: The capital of the United States is Washington DC. Capital can also mean "wealth" or "a large letter".</p> <p>The Capitol (usually capitalized) is the actual building in which the government and legislature meets: We will travel to the Capitol this weekend.</p>
censor sensor censure	<p>Censor is to prohibit free expression: The principal censored all references to smoking in school publications.</p> <p>A sensor is something that interprets stimulation: The lights are turned on by a movement sensor.</p> <p>Censure is rebuke, harsh criticism: Morty Skustin was severely censured for putting the frog in the water cooler.</p>
cite site sight	<p>Cite means "to quote or mention": He cited a famous theorist in his speech.</p> <p>Site is a noun meaning "a place": At which site will we stage the party?</p> <p>Sight is a noun meaning "view": The sight of the New York City skyline is spectacular.</p>
climactic climatic	<p>Climactic refers to the peak: Wendell sneezed right at the climactic moment of a movie.</p> <p>Climatic refers to the climate and weather: New Monia is known for its dramatic climatic changes.</p>
coarse course	<p>Coarse is an adjective meaning "rough, big-grained, not fine": We need to use coarse sandpaper to remove the paint from this wood.</p> <p>Course is a noun referring to a direction (the course of a ship) or a series of lectures on one subject (a history course in college): The poetry course Stu deBaker took in collidge changed the course of his life.</p>
collaborate corroborate	<p>Collaborate means "to work together": Collaborate with the people on your team.</p> <p>Corroborate means "to support with evidence" or "prove true": The testimony was corroborated with evidence of his innocence.</p>
complement compliment	<p>Complement means "to supplement" or "make complete": Their two personalities complement each other.</p> <p>Compliment means "to praise or congratulate": She received a compliment on her sense of fashion.</p>
compose	<p>Compose means to "make up" and is often used in the passive voice:</p>

comprise	<p>The class is composed of students of several nationalities.</p> <p>Comprise means "have, consist of, or include": Students of several nationalities comprise the class. A rule to remember would be that the whole comprises its parts, and the parts compose the whole.</p>
concurrent consecutive	<p>Concurrent simultaneous or happening at the same time as something else: concurrent blizzards in three different states.</p> <p>Consecutive means "successive or one after another": The state had three consecutive blizzards that month.</p>
conform confirm	<p>Conform means "to be similar to": Some schools conform their students by using uniforms.</p> <p>Confirm is to make sure or double check: to confirm a flight reservation.</p>
congenial congenital	<p>Congenial describes something likeable, suitable to taste: They enjoy the congenial surroundings in their home.</p> <p>Congenital refers to a condition present at birth because of heredity: Raymond has a congenital heart defect.</p>
connote denote	<p>Connote means to "imply or suggest": 'Home' connotes warmth and safety.</p> <p>Denote means to "indicate specifically, to mean": 'Home' denotes the place where you live.</p>
conscience conscious	<p>Conscience is the feeling or knowledge of right and wrong: My conscience wouldn't allow me to compete with someone so much weaker than me.</p> <p>Conscious refers to being awake and aware: Molly Coddle was still conscious after banging her head on the headboard.</p>
continual continuous	<p>Continual means "repeated with breaks in between": We need continual rain throughout the summer for crops to grow.</p> <p>Continuous means "without stopping": The continuous drumming of the rain on the windows put Herman to sleep.</p>
convince persuade	<p>Convince is to cause another to feel sure or believe something to be true: Well, Argyle Greenpasture has convinced me that aliens do exist.</p> <p>Persuade is to talk someone into doing something: Percy persuaded me to help him wash his car.</p>
co-operation corporation	<p>Co-operation means "working together": I would like to thank you for your cooperation with us on the project.</p> <p>A corporation is a large company: Presidents of large corporations receive tens of millions of dollars in salary.</p>
corps core corpse	<p>Corps (pronounced 'core') is an organization of people dedicated to a single goal: Lucinda joined the Peace Corps after college.</p> <p>A core is the center of a fruit containing seeds: Bartholomew eats apples, core and all.</p> <p>A corpse is a dead body: The corpse of Danny's dog was lovingly laid to</p>

	rest in the back yard.
correspondence correspondents	Correspondence is agreement or written communication such as letters or news articles: Phil and Rachel continued their correspondence for years. Correspondents are those who write this communication: Rhoda Lott has lived abroad as a news correspondent for several years.
could not care less	This expression is often confusing for English language learners. It is always used with a negative and means that you really don't care at all: Since she was sick, Mona could not care less about doing her homework, or Mona could not care less which color sweater she wore.
council counsel consul	A council is a group of people called together to meet on an issue: The school board council meets every Thursday evening. Counsel is advice: I always go to Clyde for counsel on the tough decision in my life. A consul is a diplomat appointed to protect the citizens and commercial interests of one country in another: If you need help starting a business in France, talk to the US consul in Paris.
creak creek	Creak can be the noun or verb for a squeak or groan: The creak of the floorboards alerted Nell that Bernard was sneaking up on her. A creek is a small stream: The kids loved to play in the creek on a hot summer day.
credible creditable	Credible means "believable or reliable": There is no credible evidence that it was I who broke the lamp. Creditable means "worthy of praise or respect": I couldn't have broken the lamp because I have a creditable alibi.
criteria criterion	Criterion is singular: There is only one criterion for this job. Criteria is plural: Several criteria need to be met in order for us to move forward.
custom costume	A custom is a cultural tradition: It is a custom in Japan to remove your shoes when entering a home. A costume is the outfit worn to represent a particular time, event, or culture: What is your costume for Halloween going to be?

• D •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

dairy diary	A dairy is a farm where milk and milk products are produced: Madeleine grew up on a dairy and knows how to churn butter. A diary is the daily journal kept: Rhoda Book writes in her diary for two hours every night.
deduction	Deduction is drawing a general principle from particular facts or

induction	<p>instances: I've seen hundreds of robins and they all have red breasts. (General principle-all robins have red breasts.)</p> <p>Induction is the explanation of particular facts or instances from a general principle: That bird must be a robin because it has a red breast. (General principle-all robins have red breasts.)</p>
denote connote	See connote, denote.
describe ascribe	See ascribe, describe.
desert dessert	<p>Desert means "to abandon" (and can also be a noun, meaning "a wasteland"): Cooley deserted his family when they all got tattoos and lip piercings.</p> <p>Dessert is the sweet course of a meal: The whole family wanted to have cake for dessert.</p>
device devise	<p>A device is an instrument used to perform a task: This device will peel apples for you.</p> <p>Devise is to create or invent: They will devise a scheme to continue the business.</p>
diary dairy	See dairy, diary .
divers diverse	<p>Divers means "several": You can take that statement in divers ways.</p> <p>Diverse means "different or varied": There are many diverse cultures in the world.</p>
different from different than	Different from is the standard usage when comparing two things: Suzie's sweater is different from Mary's. Don't say, "Different than something else."
discreet discrete	<p>Discreet means "modest and prudent": Please be discreet about the surprise party, we don't want her to find out.</p> <p>Discrete means "separate and distinct": Even though they were married, they kept their money in two discrete accounts.</p>
disinterested uninterested	<p>Disinterested is an adjective that means "unbiased or impartial": Since she had nothing at stake, she was a disinterested party in the matter.</p> <p>Uninterested means "not interested": Anita Job was just uninterested in the offer.</p>
dispersion aspersion	See aspersion, dispersion.

• E •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

e. g.	e. g. is a Latin abbreviation meaning "for example": Lucille doesn't like fruit, e.g. pears, apples, grapes, and bananas.
i. e.	i. e. is a Latin abbreviation meaning "that is (to say)": Myrtle had to leave the room, i.e. she had to go to the bathroom.
each other	Use each other when only two objects are involved: The twins love each other.
one another	Use one another in referring to more than two objects: The triplets all love one another.
each	These are singular distributive pronouns; use them with a singular verb. Each refers to a single individual in a group: Each of us voted differently.
every	Every refers to all the members of a group inclusively: Every one of us voted the same.
effect	See affect, effect .
affect	
elicit	Elicit is a verb that means "to draw out": The teacher had trouble eliciting responses from the students.
illicit	Illicit is an adjective meaning "illegal or illegitimate": Illicit drugs or illicit behavior may help you enter jail.
elude	See allude, elude .
allude	
emigrant	An emigrant is a person who leaves his native country to settle in another: The emigrants left everything behind in search of something more.
immigrant	An immigrant refers is person who moves to a new country: Many immigrants settle in this country every year.
emigrate	Emigrate from means "to leave one's country": Frances emigrated to the US.
immigrate	Immigrate to means "to settle in another country": Her family immigrated to the US four generations ago.
eminent	Eminent means "of high rank, outstanding, or prestigious": An eminent author came to read at the university.
emanant	Emanant means "sending or issuing forth": Emanant thoughts like those should be kept to yourself.
imminent	Imminent means "close to happening or near": Everyone waited anxiously for an imminent storm predicted to arrive shortly.
enervate	Innervate means "to supply with nerves or vitality": The therapist innervated the shoulders with massage.
innervate	Enervate is to weaken or destroy the vitality of: The negative attitude enervated her enthusiasm.
entomology	Entomology refers to the study of insects: Donald couldn't be afraid of bugs if he wanted to get a degree in entomology.
etymology	

	<p>Etymology is the study of the history of words and where they come from: The etymology of <i>mortify</i> goes back to Latin mortuus "dead". is nice.</p>
etc.	<p>Etc. is Latin for et cetera and means "and so on": You need to bring plates, knives, forks, spoons, etc. to the table. It is a good idea, however, to just finish the list, not letting it end with etc. But if you must, use a phrase like "and so on", "and so forth".</p>
ethereal ephemeral	<p>Ethereal describes something that is light, airy, and intangible: Ethereal clouds hovered above; Everything in the ballroom looked ethereal.</p> <p>Ephemeral refers to anything lasting for a short period: Truth can be an ephemeral thing; A creek can be ephemeral if it disappears in the middle of summer.</p>
everyone every one	<p>Everyone means "each person": Everyone in the room must leave immediately.</p> <p>Every one refers to each thing or person individually: Felice put every one of the eggs in the basket.</p>
exceed accede	See accede, exceed .
except accept	See accept, except .
explicit implicit	<p>Explicit means "clear and direct": Please give me explicit directions.</p> <p>Implicit means "indirectly, with some parts understood": They implicitly agreed to never talk on the subject again.</p>

• F •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

fair	A fair is an exhibition of farm produce usually with a collection of rides and attractions: Every year our family goes to the state fair.
fare	A fare is the fee you pay to ride public transportation: The fare to ride the bus is affordable in our town.
farther	Farther has to do with distance: How much farther is it to Poughkeepsie?
further	Further means "additional" or "more": Please give me further information about the best route to Poughkeepsie.
faze	Faze is to distress or disturb: The scrutiny of the media didn't faze Sharon.
phase	A phase is a period of development or a period of time in a cycle of

	events: Stuart went through a phase when all he did was eat hot dogs.
few	Few is used when talking about things that can be counted: Lureen has a few ideas; also a few keys, few clouds, few values, few diseases.
less	Less is used when talking about things that can't be counted: Lureen shows less perseverance than we expected; also less distance, less pollution, less rain.
figuratively	Figuratively refers to metaphoric speech, not realistic or exact: To say, "Horace died laughing," is to speak figuratively.
literally	Literally refers to realistic or exact speech: If Horace literally died laughing, he must be buried (but it was not such a bad way to go).
flammable	These two words both mean "easily set on fire": a highly flammable/inflammable substance. However, flammable is now used as a warning to avoid misinterpreting the prefix <i>in-</i> as negation.
inflammable	
flare	Flare is to increase greatly, burn brightly, or something that provides a bright flame: The fire in the grill flared brightly when Eva tossed gasoline on it.
flair	Flair refers to a sense of style or a talent: Dutch Masters has a flair for entertaining a group of men.
flaunt	To flaunt means "to show off": Maud Lynn Dresser likes to flaunt her jewels at parties.
flout	To flout means "to show scorn or contempt for": Larry flouts the speed limit in every state when it suits his schedule.
forbear	Forbear means "to refrain from": The children simply could not forbear laughing in the library.
forebear	A forebear is an ancestor or forefather: Our forebears who founded this country centuries ago.
foreword	A foreword is a short introduction at the beginning of a book usually written by someone other than the author: The foreword of the book explains how its thesis fits in with current thinking.
forward	Forward is an adverb indicating movement ahead or toward the front: Priscilla moves forward slowly in the line at the grocery store.
forth	Forth means "forward, from this point": Barry moved forth without looking back.
fourth	Fourth indicates an object that comes between No. 3 and No. 5: Dustin Moppet just finished cleaning the fourth floor.
foul	Foul can mean "offensive, rotten, or unfavorable": Foul language, foul meat, and foul weather are unacceptable at a picnic.
fowl	Fowl refers to birds, especially domestic ones: Chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys are considered fowl.
found	Found is the past tense of find: I found my glasses only after I had stepped on them!
founded	Founded is past tense of the verb found , meaning "to set up or

establish": My ancestors were the ones who founded this country.

founder
flounder

Founder means "to run aground": The boat foundered on a shoal in the storm.

Flounder means "to move clumsily, with difficulty" or "to blunder": Gladys Friday is floundering in college.

• G •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

gibe
gybe
jibe

Gibe means "to taunt, jeer, make fun of": His classmates giped Billy Earl for wearing his underwear over his clothes.

Gybe means "to swing a fore-and-aft sail from one side of a sailboat to the other to change course": When the wind shifted, Felix gybed when he should have tacked.

Jibe refers to being in agreement: Our views on everything from baseball to Socrates seem to jibe.

gorilla
guerrilla

A **gorilla** is a large ape: Gorillas live in the African tropical forest.

A **guerrilla** is a member of irregular military that uses surprise attacks on its enemy: Guerrilla warfare uses tactics such as espionage, sabotage, and ambush.

• H •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

hail
hale

Hail means "to greet or to come from": She hails from California. Hail also means "balls of ice": Hail damaged the crops.

Hale means "sound or healthy": Minnie Miles is hale and hearty enough to run five miles daily.

hanged
hung

Hanged is past tense of hang in the sense of executing someone by using a rope around the neck: Outlaws in the Old West were hanged when they could be caught.

Hung is the past tense of hang, but is used for things: Lyda Cain's son never hung up his clothes. Just remember hanged is used for people (Yuck!), and hung is used for other things.

hardly

This is a word used in a negative sense meaning "barely": Lyle could hardly keep his eyes open at the lecture by Rhoda Book.

herd
heard

A **herd** is a group of animals: Nonnie saw a herd of cows in the pasture.

Heard is the past tense of **hear**: Zelda heard the bells ringing for the

	glorious leader who had recently died.
here	Here refers to the place where you are: You should come here more often.
hear	Hear is to listen with the ears: Am I speaking loud enough for you to hear me?
heroin	Heroin is an illicit drug: Heroin is a very addicting substance.
heroine	A heroine is a female hero in real life or in a story: Marge was treated like a heroine when she delivered the baby in a cab.
historic	Historic refers to something in history that was important: The summit was a historic meeting between the countries.
historical	Historical refers to anything in general history: The whole class had to dress in historical costumes for the play.
hoard	Hoard means "to collect and keep for oneself": Squirrels hoard acorns during the winter.
horde	A horde is a large group: Hordes of people go Christmas shopping the day after Thanksgiving.
hole	A hole is a gap or space: A moth made a hole in my sweater.
whole	Whole means "complete": Stu Beef ate the whole pizza himself!
home	Home in is the correct phrase here is when referring to getting closer to a goal or target: The missile homed in electronically on the target.
hone	Hone means "to sharpen": Denise made a resolution to hone her piano playing skills.



i. e.	See e. g., i. e.
e. g.	
illicit	See elicit, illicit.
elicit	
illusion	See allusion, illusion.
allusion	
immemorial	Immemorial refers to that which is beyond time, ancient: These artifacts have been here since time immemorial.
immortal	Immortal describes things that live forever: The way Randolph drives, he must think that he is immortal.
immoral	Immoral means "not nice, unethical, bad": Stealing is immoral.
immoral	See amoral, immoral.
amoral	

immigrant
emigrant

immigrate
emigrate

imminent
eminent, emanant

[See emigrant, immigrant.](#)

[See emigrate, immigrate.](#)

[See eminent.](#)

implicate, imply

Implicate means "to closely link or connect": The blood on his hands implicated him in the murder.

Imply means "to point to, or suggest indirectly": The victim's friend implied he thought he knew who the murderer was.

implicit
explicit

[See explicit, implicit.](#)

imply
infer

Imply means "to suggest indirectly": Her hesitation implied that her answer was no.

Infer means "to draw a conclusion from known facts": He inferred that the answer was no from her hesitation.

in regard to
as regards

Both of these mean "referring to", but use one or the other: In regard to your proposal I have an idea, or: As regards your proposal, I have an idea. NOT in regards to!

inchoate
incoherent

Inchoate describes something in an early stage of development, and that is incomplete: Lucy's plan remained inchoate and was developed no further.

Incoherent describes something that is lacking connection or order: Some even thought that Lucy's plan was just a few incoherent thoughts that didn't hang together.

incredible
incredulous

Incredible means "astonishing or difficult to grasp": The incredible power of a tornado attracts storm chasers.

Incredulous means "skeptical and disbelieving": She was incredulous about Fred's interpretation of the event.

induction
deduction

[See deduction, induction.](#)

innervate
enervate

[See enervate, innervate.](#)

insure
ensure
assure

[See assure, ensure, insure.](#)

intolerable
intolerant

Intolerable refers to something unbearable: The heat during the summer of 2005 was intolerable.

Intolerant refers to a person who is unable to accept differences in opinion, habit, or belief: Maybelle is intolerant of anyone who chews with their mouth open.

irregardless
regardless

Regardless is the correct word to use, meaning "without regard": The young man left regardless of the warnings.

Irregardless is a double negative that should be avoided.

its
it's

Its is the possessive form of it, like hers, his, and theirs: The dog licked its foot after stepping in maple syrup.

It's is short for 'it is', a contraction of those two words: "Well, I guess it's [it is] time to wash the dog again."

• J •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

jibe
gibe
gybe

[See gibe, gybe, jibe.](#)

• K •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

kind of
sort of

Avoid these expressions in the sense of "somewhat", "rather" or "a little" (especially avoid reducing them to **kinda** and **sorta**). The pace of the baseball game was rather [not **kind of**] slow.

knew
new

Knew is the past tense of know: She knew what she wanted to say but couldn't say it.

New means "never used": I ordered a new custom car from the factory today.

• L •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

latent
patent

Latent means "present but not visible or active": Just because I'm not in bed doesn't mean that I don't have a latent virus.

Patent means "visible, active, or obvious": The claim that I pinched Marilyn's tush is a patent lie!

later
latter

Later means "afterward": Come later than seven o'clock.

Latter means "the last of two things mentioned": If I have to choose between brains or beauty, I'll take the latter.

lay
lie

Lay is a transitive verb, which means it takes an object. It means "to set or put down flat": Gwendolyn laid child in the crib, or Lay a book on the table, please. Its forms are *lay*, *lays*, *laid*, *has laid*, and *is laying*.

	<p>Lie is an intransitive verb, so it does not take an object. It means "to rest supine or remain in a certain place": I have to lie down because I'm not feeling well, or I like to lie in the grass for hours. Its forms are <i>lie, lies, lay, has lain</i>, and <i>is lying</i>.</p>
lead led	<p>Lead can be a verb meaning "to guide, be in charge of": Greg will lead a group this afternoon. It can also be a noun meaning "a type of metallic element": Use a lead pencil to fill in your answer sheet.</p> <p>Led is the past tense of <i>lead</i>: Greg led the group this afternoon.</p>
lend loan borrow	<p>Lend is a verb that mean "to temporarily give something to someone": Lucy will lend or loan Chuck her books any day.</p> <p>A loan is a noun meaning something borrowed: Most people get a bank loan to buy a house. Loan is also used in American English as a verb meaning "to lend".</p> <p>Borrow is to receive something from someone temporarily: Can I borrow the book if I promise to return it tomorrow?</p>
less few	<p>See few, less.</p>
lessen lesson	<p>Lessen means "to decrease or make less": She lessened the headache pain with aspirin.</p> <p>A lesson is something you learn: A teacher might say, "Today's lesson is about ancient Egypt."</p>
liable libel	<p>Liable means "legally responsible for or subject to": Tom is liable to pay for the damage if he doesn't prove his innocence.</p> <p>Libel is a noun that means "a slanderous statement that damages another person's reputation": Bertrand was sued for libel for what he printed about Phil Anders.</p>
lightening lightning	<p>Lightening is a verb that means "to reduce the weight of": My course load needs lightening if I am to complete this course successfully.</p> <p>Lightning refers to the electrical discharge in the sky: Fred captured the image of a bolt of lightning on film.</p>
like as	<p>See as, like.</p>
literally figuratively	<p>See figuratively, literally.</p>
lithe blithe	<p>See blithe, lithe.</p>
loathe loath	<p>Loathe is a verb meaning "to detest or dislike greatly": Janice loathes animal cruelty.</p> <p>Loath is an adjective meaning "reluctant, unwilling": Lance was loath to ask for an extension on his term paper that semester.</p>
loose	<p>Loose is not tight: A loose-fitting jacket was more suitable than a shawl.</p>

lose

Lose is to misplace and not be able to find: I often lose my bearings when entering a new city. Thank goodness I don't lose my keys though!

• M •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

manner
manor

Manner is a way of doing or behaving: Duane Pipes installed the plumbing in a workman-like manner.

A **manor** is a house on an estate: The chauffeur drove slowly up to the manor.

mantel
mantle

A **mantel** is the shelf above a fireplace, or face of one: Matilda set several candles on the mantel.

A **mantle** is a cloak or blanket: Velma grabbed her mantle before heading out the door.

marital
martial

Marital refers to marriage: Bunny and Lance are having marital problems.

Martial refers to war or warriors: Bunny has a black belt in martial arts.

marshal
marshall

A **marshal** is an officer of highest ranking; it can mean "to arrange": The marshal gave orders to the troops.

Marshall is a verb meaning "to together": Marshall marshaled enough strength to walk past the bar on his way home.

may be
maybe

May be as two words means "might be": Your reading glasses may be on the night stand.

Maybe is one word that means "perhaps": Maybe your reading glasses are on the night stand.

me
myself

Me is used as a simple object: Susan told my brother and me about her trip to Africa.

Myself is a reflexive and an emphatic pronoun: I talk to myself [reflexive] or you can do that yourself [emphatic].

meet
mete
meat

Meet means "to get together or connect with someone, to encounter": Elroy plans to meet a colleague for lunch.

Mete means "to distribute": We had to mete out the last of the water when we were still 20 miles from civilization on our hiking trip.

Meat is flesh that may be eaten: Nathan is a vegetarian who doesn't eat meat at all.

militate
mitigate

Militate means "to influence toward or against a change": The banality of Rhoda Book's stories militated against their becoming popular.

Mitigate means "to lessen, make easier, or bearable": A cold compress on your leg will mitigate the swelling.

mordant
trenchant

Mordant is biting sarcasm: Everyone hated Raymond's mordant comments.

Trenchant means "forceful and keen": Raymond received trenchant criticism from everyone for his comments.

most
almost

[See almost, most.](#)

Mute means "having no sound or without speech": He was struck mute by the horror of the events.

mute
moot

Moot as a noun is a public meeting; as an adjective, the more common usage, means "open to debate" in the UK and "not open to debate" in the US. It is most often used in the phrase *moot point*: When Walter walked in, the question of who was going to pick him up became moot.

• N •

WORDS

DEFINITIONS & EXAMPLES

no
know

No means "the opposite of yes": They all said no in response to the latest referendum.

To **know** is to understand or realize: I don't want to know how you got up the tree.

noisome
noisy

Noisome means "disgusting, offensive, and potentially harmful": A noisome smell arose from the garbage can.

Noisy means "making a lot of sound or racket": With so many children, it became a noisy day care center.

nonplussed

Nonplussed is often misused in the sense of "calm and unbothered". The actual meaning is "confused or bewildered": She was nonplussed by her husband's unusual behavior.

nowhere
nowheres

[See anyway, anywhere, nowhere; anyways, anywhere, nowheres.](#)

• O •

obeisance
obsequious

Obeisance is respect and homage paid someone: Farina greeted the queen with sincere obeisance.

Obsequiousness is submissiveness and an eagerness to obey: The obsequiousness of the waiter made them roll their eyes.

obtuse
abstruse

Obtuse means "lacking quickness of wit or sensitivity, dull, dense": Brandon is so obtuse he doesn't even know when he is being insulted.

Abstruse means "too difficult to understand for the average mind": The professor presented an abstruse metaphysical concept that went over our

heads.

one another
each other

[See each other, one another.](#)

overdo
overdue

Overdo is to exaggerate something: Marcy overdoes her makeup every morning and she ends up looking like a clown.

Overdue indicates something that has missed its deadline: You must return these overdue books to the library immediately, or A visit to our grandparents is long overdue.

• P •

pamper
pander

To **pamper** is to coddle, or treat with indulgence: The only time my mom pampers me is when I'm sick.

To **pander** is to cater to the base needs of others, to sell out: Senator Throckmorton got elected by pandering to special interest groups.

passed
past

Passed is the past tense of pass, to go by or move ahead of: The boys passed through town quickly.

Past is a place in time that was before now: You would be wise to reflect on the past and learn from it.

pasture
pastor

A **pasture** is a place where farm animals graze: Al Falfa puts his cows out into the pasture every morning.

A **pastor** is a member of the clergy, a minister of a church: Noah Sarque is the pastor of the local Baptist Church.

patent
latent

[See latent, patent.](#)

patience
patients

Patience is the ability to remain calm even when dealing with someone or something difficult: The teacher showed infinite patience for the students struggling with the reading material. ([See also assistance and assistants.](#))

Patients are people who are sick in a hospital: The nurse had several new patients to get to know that week.

peace
piece

Peace is a sense of calm and absence of war or hostility: We all hope for peace throughout the world.

A **piece** is a part or segment of something: Helen Highwater lost a piece of her jewelry in church last Sunday.

peek
pique
peak

To **peek** is to look quickly without someone knowing: The child peeked inside the gift.

To **pique** is to arouse or provoke: Muriel's comment piqued Abner's curiosity. Pique can also be used as a noun meaning "resentment": Sedgewick felt a bit of pique at the association of his name with their real estate scheme.

A **peak** is the highest point of something: Chastity decided not to drive

	to the top of Pike's Peak during the peak summer vacation season.
peer pier	<p>To peer is to squint and gaze strongly at: Melvin had to peer through fog to keep the car on the highway.</p> <p>a peer is an equal: Farnsworth didn't consider anyone his peer when it came to the game of tiddledy winks.</p> <p>A pier is a walkway that juts into a body of water for docking: to he docked his boat at the end of the pier.</p>
penultimate ultimate	<p>Penultimate means "the next to the last (the ultimate)": Little did Al Pacca know that the penultimate shrimp he ate was the one that gave him food poisoning.</p> <p>Ultimate is the last or best: I found the ultimate gift for Gary this year.</p>
perspective prospective	<p>A perspective is a view from a certain place or position or a mental outlook: The perspective from this building is spectacular, or Lydia Potts has a wonderful perspective on life considering the fact that she has 12 kids.</p> <p>Prospective is an adjective that means "possible, likely to happen": We have several prospective opportunities before us.</p>
persuade convince	See convince, persuade.
phase faze	See faze, phase.
piquant pique	<p>Piquant means "pleasantly tart or spicy": This restaurant serves a piquant salsa that is absolutely delicious.</p> <p>To pique is to arouse or provoke: Grunella piqued Vern's curiosity with her question. (See also peek.)</p>
plain plane	<p>Plain means "simple not showy" or "a large level region": It was plain to see that Vanessa loved Conway, or Bowser's farm was on a great plain where wheat grew well.</p> <p>A plane is a flat and level surface, a new level, or an airplane: To understand the equation of a plane surface in mathematics you have to reach a new plane of consciousness. Franklin landed the plane successfully.</p>
portent potent	<p>A portent is a noun meaning "an omen or prophetic sign of the future": Ivan Oder took falling out of bed that morning as a portent of a greater disaster in the future.</p> <p>Potent is an adjective meaning "strong and powerful": Arnold was a potent man, even at seventy, but could not handle the potent martinis Bella Donna made.</p>
pour pore pore	<p>To pour is to dispense liquid from one container into another: She poured some milk into the glass.</p> <p>A pore is to study or read intensely: Hilda pored over the materials nightly.</p>

practical
practicable

Pore also means "a small opening in skin through which moisture or air moves": Pores are all over our bodies.

Practical refers to being easily used and put into practice: A Swiss Army knife has many practical uses.

Practicable means "feasible or possible": It is not always practicable for a busy person to use this tool.

precede
proceed

The verb **precede** means "to come or go before, in front of": The flower girl preceded the bride in the procession down the aisle.

Proceed means "to move forward": Both the flower girl and the bride proceeded down the aisle at the same time.

premise
premises

A **premise** usually means "assumption": Since the basic premise was wrong, all the conclusions based on it were wrong, too.

Premises are a house or building and the grounds around it: Smoking is not allowed on the premises.

presence
presents

Presence means "the state of being near": April's presence was comforting in Rod's time of sorrow.

Presents are gifts: The greatest gift is to let someone give you a present.

principal
principle

A **principal** is the head of a professional business or school: The principal of the middle school is a woman of principles.

A **principle** is a belief: I avoid school principals as a matter of principle.

profit
prophet

Profit is the money earned above the expense it took to complete the project: Ghislaine and Pierre made a \$100,000 profit when they remodeled and sold their house.

A **prophet** is a person who can foretell the future and through which a divine presence speaks: Atheism is a non-prophet religion.

profligate
prolific

Profligate is to be wasteful and extravagant: Esmeralda is so profligate that she spent the entire million dollars she won in the lottery in one year.

Prolific means "abundant, fruitful, producing much": John Grisham is a prolific writer.

• Q •

quiet
quite

Quiet means "without sound or mention of": You are supposed to be quiet in hospitals and libraries.

Quite can mean either "completely or somewhat, rather", depending on what you mean: I was quite alone that Saturday afternoon (completely) but the hours passed quite quickly (rather).

quote
quotation

Quote is a verb meaning "to state the exact words someone else said": The pastor quoted scripture from the Bible or Carmen quoted a famous psychologist in complaining to the boss.

A **quotation** is the actual statement being quoted: Gretchen read a

quotation every day.

• R •

rain
reign
rein

Rain is the water that falls from the sky: Dingwell didn't have sense enough to come in out of the rain.

Reign is the rule of a king or queen: King Wilhelm reigned with an iron fist to keep peace in the land.

A **rein** (usually plural, *reins*) are the straps of leather used to control and guide a horse: No matter how hard Reginald pulled on the reins, the horse would not slow down.

raise
raze

Raise means "to build or grow": The farmer raises corn. The Amish will raise the walls of a building by noon.

Raze is to destroy: The school was razed and a new one built in its place.

real
really

Real is a variant of *really* used in dialectal areas (like the Southern US) where adverbs are not distinguished from adjectives: She sings real good, in standard English is: She sings really well.

Really is an intensifying adverb: Gwendolyn was really tired after playing outside all day.

reality
reality

Reality means "the perceived world as it is, the true situation": She could not tell the difference between reality and fantasy.

Realty is land or real estate: Realty in large cities is markedly expensive.

rebate
refund

A **rebate** is a discount from the manufacturer to the customer after a purchase has been made: The \$600 computer cost only \$69.43 after all the rebates.

A **refund** is a full repayment to a dissatisfied customer: Mildred returned her girdle and demanded a full refund.

regimen
regiment

Regimen is a systematic plan: Sylvia is undergoing a regimen for a healthier lifestyle.

Regiment is a troop of soldiers: The army is made up of several regiments.

residence
residents

A **residence** is where people live, the house or building: The mayor's residence is located in the center of the city.

The **residents** are the people who live there: The residents of the community think the mayor's residence is too luxurious.

respectable
respectful
respective

Respectable means "deserving respect or on good behavior": Mother always told us to be respectable in public.

Respectful refers to showing respect: Be respectful of the people around you, especially if they have sticks.

Respective means "individual and appropriate": The summer camp kids were shown to their respective cabins.

respectfully
respectively

Respectfully means "politely and with respect": Mel Pew always dealt respectfully with each and every customer.

Respectively refers to the order in which things are given: I gave Wallace and Linda blue and green socks, respectively, means that I gave Wallace blue socks and Linda green ones.

restive
restful

Restive means "impatient and nervous, restless": Cory became restive once he knew the boss was going to call him into his office.

Restful means "full of rest, calm, quiet, and restorative": A restful vacation in Indonesia was just what the doctored ordered.

retch
wretch

To **retch** is to try and vomit: Furman retched several times after swallowing a bite of Lurleen's liver pudding.

A **wretch** is a miserable or wicked person: I didn't believe she could be such a wretch.

rifle
riffle

Rifle means to search with the intention of stealing or taking: The mugger rifled Clarissa's purse looking for cash.

To **riffle** means "to shuffle or flip quickly through papers": Bill riffled the card deck before dealing.

right
rite
write

Right means "correct": She always knew the right thing to say.

A **rite** is a ceremony: Final rites for the deceased were held in the church.

To **write** is to express oneself in writing: Rhoda Book writes everyone about her publishing career.

rise
raise

Rise is intransitive and does not have an object: The sun rises in the east.

Raise always has an object: You can raise a crop on a farm or raise your hand in class.

road
rode

Road is a long path or street to travel on: Lucille tries to stay on a main road wherever she travels.

Rode is past tense of ride: Matilda rode her bicycle over a cliff by accident.

role
roll

A **role** is a part in a play or movie: Marjorie's favorite role of her entire movie career was that of the quirky neighbor in *Keep your Doors*

Locked. It can also mean "a function of": Marjorie's role in removing the insignia from the police car door was minor.

Roll is a verb meaning "to turn over and over": Diane rolled the flat tire into the garage.

• S •

sale
sail

A **sale** is a noun meaning "the selling of something": Every car sale means a commission for the salesman.

A **sail** is the material used to catch wind on a boat: The sail billowed in the wind as Jacob's boat slid across the water.

sale	A sale is a noun meaning "the selling of something": Every car sale means a commission for the salesman.
sell	To sell , the verb, is to offer goods for consumption at a cost: Seth sells his pottery at art fairs.
sanguine	Sanguine means "red, ruddy or optimistic": I am not sanguine about your getting this job.
saturnine	Saturnine means "being moody, sullen, or melancholy": Ima Aiken falls into a saturnine mood every time her husband Hadley goes away on business.
scene	Scene is a place or view: The scene of the crime was just outside his window.
seen	Seen is past tense of see: I have seen that movie three times already.
seam	A seam is where two pieces are joined: The seam of Leticia's dress ripped when she bent over.
seem	To seem is to appear or look as if: Leticia seemed unhappy when that happened.
semimonthly	See bimonthly, semimonthly.
bimonthly	
sensor	See censor, sensor, censure.
censor	
censure	
sensual	Sensual refers to physical, especially sexual, pleasure: Derry Yare wears sensual dresses to attract men.
sensuous	Sensuous refers to anything artistic that appeals to the senses or appetites: Marguerita had prepared a sensual feast for her guests.
serf	A serf is a slave or servant: Neil Downe came from a family of serfs but rose to become a landlord.
surf	To surf is to ride the waves of water, or to search on the Internet: The surf is up down at the beach; ou can surf the Internet some other time.
set	Set is a transitive verb meaning "to put or place something solid somewhere": Marvin set his new lamp on the table.
sit	Sit means "to rest upright with the weight on the buttocks or to move into such a position"; the past tense is <i>sat</i> : Percy sat down beside Geneva on the park bench.
seat	Seat can be a verb meaning "to show someone their seat or where to sit": The waiter seated Murgatroyd at his usual table by the door.
sever	Sever means "to cut through completely": One blow from Jessie's hatchet severed the rope.
severe	Severe means "strict, hard, extreme": Severe winter weather came early this year. There was a severe tone in Marilyn's voice when she berated Todd for putting the tack in her chair.
shear	Shear means "to cut off": We shear sheep's wool in the spring and we

	shear the hedges in the summer.
sheer	Sheer means "pure, unadulterated": Felicity found the amusement park a sheer pleasure. Sheer also means "transparent": Perry Winkle hung sheer curtains in the living room.
shore	A shore is a beach: to spend a vacation on the shore. It also means "to brace or support": They shored up the leaning wall with steel beams.
sure	Sure means "without doubt": Maria was sure about the decision to move to another country.
singly	Singly means "one by one": The fire drill required everyone to leave the building quietly and singly.
singularly	Singularly means "extraordinarily, in an outstanding manner": He singularly fought the rebels off one by one.
site	See cite, site, sight.
sight	
cite	
sleight-of-hand	Sleight of hand refers to dexterity and trickery with the hands: The magician's sleight of hand fooled the audience.
slight-of-hand	This phrase is often confused with slight of hand , an adjective phrase meaning "having small slender hands".
sole	Sole means "single": The sole remaining person in the room left, leaving it empty. It also means the bottom of a foot or shoe: Gigi needed new soles on her shoes.
soul	A soul refers to the spirit of a living creature: Do you believe animals have souls?
some time	Some time refers to a considerable period of time: I need some time to think about it.
sometime	Sometime refers to an indistinct or unstated time in the future: I'll see you around sometime.
sometimes	Sometimes is an adverb meaning continually, off and on, occasionally: Karen sometimes drinks coffee instead of tea.
stationary	Stationary means "still and unmoving": The cat was stationary until it was time to pounce on its prey.
stationery	Stationery refers to writing materials such as paper: Craig took out his best stationery to write to his beloved Charlotte Russe.
statue	A statue is a carved or shaped imitation of an object: There is a statue of a large bird in her garden.
statute	A statute is law: The government publishes new statutes each year.
stature	Stature means "status, standing": Chester Drors is a man of substantial stature in state politics.
storey	Storey is the British spelling of <i>story</i> when this word refers to a floor of a building: The upper storeys of the building comprised apartments. The US spelling of this sense of the word is also <i>story</i> .
story	

A **story** is a tale related in speech or writing by someone. In the US, it is also the spelling used to refer to the floor of a building: My home is three stories high.

straight
strait

Straight is an adjective that means having "no bends or curve"s:
Pimsley's walking cane is as straight as an arrow.

A **strait** is a narrow channel connecting two bodies of water: The Bering Strait lies between Alaska and Siberia.

supposedly
supposably

Supposedly means "reputedly" or "likely to be true": Sam is supposedly the greatest waterboy in the football team's history.

Supposably means "can be supposed": The best solution to the problem is supposably to ignore it. (However, this word is seldom used.)

• T •

taut
taught

Taut is a literary word that means "tight": Hold the string taut while I mark the line.

Taught is the past tense of teach: Kenneth taught etiquette and good manners for several years.

tenant
tenet

A **tenant** is someone who rents property: A new tenant moved into the vacant apartment last week.

A **tenet** is a principle: The major tenets of all religions are similar.

than
then

Than is used to compare: Philippa Byrd thinks she is smarter than any of us.

Then is a word to describe a time that is not now: I prefer Friday; it would be better to meet then because then I will be ready.

their
there
they're

Their is possessive of they: The twins left their books at home.
There refers to a place that is not here: We will be there in two hours.
They're is a contraction for they are: They're going to a concert tonight.

themselves
themselves
themselves
themselves

Only **themselves** is correct as a reflexive or emphatic pronoun: They gave themselves all the credit for the rescue.

threw
through

Although these two words are pronounced the same, **threw** is the past tense of the verb *throw*, meaning "tossed, hurled in the air": Morty threw the keys to the car to McKinley.

Through is a preposition meaning "entering the inside of something and coming out the other side": Chuck accidentally threw a rock through Miss Conception's living room window.

throes
throws

Throes are severe pains or difficult times: Wade Rivers found it difficult to listen to his iPod in the throes of battle.

Throws is the plural or present tense of throw: Several throws later, Bud Light managed to put a wad of paper in the trash can from his desk.

til
till

Til is a contraction of the preposition *until*: I won't see you til tomorrow.
Only one L.

Till is a verb meaning "to cultivate": My Uncle Emmet tills about half the land on his farm and herds cattle on the rest.

to
too
two

To is a preposition meaning "toward": We go to the lake every summer.
It also serves as the infinitive particle for verbs: I want to stop confusing words.

Too means "also": I'd love to go with you, too.

Two is the number between one and three: We have two options: hire a divorce lawyer or a mortician.

torpid
turgid

Torpid means "unresponsive, lacking alertness": Prunella tried to elicit answers from the torpid students in front of her.

Turgid means "very ornate and decorative": The author's turgid writing style lost my interest quickly. It can also mean "swollen and bulging": Turgid veins covered her legs.

tortuous
torturous

Tortuous means "winding, crooked, with many twists and turns": Wiley Driver was very adept at driving the tortuous mountain roads of western North Carolina.

Torturous means "very painful, like torture": Mick Stupp found doing math homework torturous.

• U •

undoubtedly
undoubtably
indubitably

These three words may be used interchangeably, meaning "sure, without a doubt": Mildred was *undoubtedly*| *undoubtably*|*indubitably* the best ballet dancer of all time.

uninterested
disinterested

[See disinterested, uninterested.](#)

• V •

vane
vain
vein

A **vane** is blade that rotates: I don't know how hard the wind blew; it blew the weather vane off the roof.

Vain means "fruitless, hopeless, or without result": Bertie harbors a vain hope of becoming a world-class ice skater.

Vein refers to the tubes that carry blood back to the heart: The veins are

usually smaller than the arteries.

venal
venial

Venal means "corruptible, money-grubbing, likely to accept bribes":

Chris Cross is a man so venal he charged his mother for taking her to the hospital.

Venial means "easily forgiven": The judge dismissed the venial crimes and focused on the theft of the chocolates.

verses
versus

Verses is plural of verse, a line of poetry: several Emerson's verses were recited that evening.

Versus means "in comparison or opposition to": The benefits of having a cell phone versus not having one depend on the individual.

vicious
viscous

Vicious means "cruel and mean": A vicious dog attacked the young boy.

Viscous means "thick and sticky": Honey and tar are viscous substances.

• WXYZ •

waist
waste

Waist refers the (often) narrow area of a human body between the hips and ribs: We often wear a belt around our waist.

Waste is garbage, or waste can be a verb meaning "to use carelessly": You shouldn't waste food and you should recycle waste paper.

wary
weary

Wary means "leery and cautious": The customer became wary when the salesperson said he would personally guarantee the TV set for 100 years.

Weary means "tired and worn": After a day of harvesting corn, the farmer was very weary.

wave
waive

To **wave** is to move back and forth; a **wave** is a swelling in a body of water due to movement: Helen Highwater waved her hand to the boat rocking in the waves.

Waive means "to give up, not require or ask for": Never waive your right to a lawyer.

weak
week

Weak is not strong: Finley gave a weak performance; maybe because he has a weak mind.

Week refers to the names of the seven days, from Sunday to Saturday: I go to the ice skating rink once a week.

wear
ware
were
we're

Wear is a verb (wear, wore, worn) meaning to have clothing on: Maud Lynn Dresser always wears gaudy evening gowns on formal occasions.

Ware is an article of merchandise, a product (usually used in the plural): The potter displayed her wares on a beautiful stand made by her husband.

Were is past tense of are: Maud and her fiance were at the ball last weekend.

We're is a contraction for we are: We're going to the ball this weekend so maybe we'll see them.

weather

Weather has to do with climate: I hope we have beautiful weather for

whether	<p>my daughter's wedding.</p> <p>Whether means "if" and is used only inside sentences: I don't know whether to bring an umbrella or not.</p>
wet whet	<p>Wet is full of moisture: We had to dry out the wet sleeping bag on our camping trip after a sudden storm.</p> <p>Whet is to stimulate or arouse: Smelling the stew whetted her appetite.</p>
which witch	<p>Which means "what particular choice": Which witch put the spell on you?</p> <p>A witch is a person who believes in or practices magic: Not all witches have warts on their noses (some have them on their chins).</p>
who's whose	<p>Who's is a contraction for <i>who is</i>: Who's going to vote today?</p> <p>Whose is the possessive of <i>who</i> meaning "of whom": Whose tickets are these?</p>
wont won't	<p>Wont means "used to": Maggie was wont to getting everything her way and cried when she didn't.</p> <p>Won't is a contraction for will not: Maggie won't be getting every toy she wants this Christmas.</p>
your you're	<p>Your is possessive for you: Your idea is fantastic!</p> <p>You're is a contraction for you are: You're the most treasured person in my life.</p>